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Letter to the Editor



“Dickens and the Codebreakers”

25 April 2016

Dear Editor,

You will recall that in July 2015, just as the Dickens Society Symposium in Halifax was ending, the story of the *All the Year Round* annotated set broke. This discovery by Dr. Jeremy Parrott was, both in my view and in the opinion of many other Dickens specialists, potentially one of the most important advancements in periodical scholarship in our lifetime. I published an article on the topic, entitled “Dickens and the Codebreakers,” in the December 2015 issue of this journal, and I continue to be involved in the process to bring the solutions to these longstanding literary puzzles into the public domain.

Several pieces about the find appeared in the media in the week that Dr. Parrott made his first public pronouncement, at a conference in Belgium. Among these sensational reports was an article in the *Independent* by Emily Dugan, which spoke of a newly identified piece by Elizabeth Gaskell, written in 1864, wrongly pinpointed to be “Old, New, and No Music” (in two parts). This error might have been occasioned by the rush to get details of the more important finds into the public domain, before the story went cold.

After the publication of my *Dickens Quarterly* piece, I was contacted by Prof. Robert Bledsoe, author of a fine study entitled *Dickens Journalism, Music* (2013), concerning this specific attribution to Gaskell. He pointed out that his detailed researches indicated that the author of “Old, New, and No Music” was the music critic Henry Chorley. I then checked with both the *Independent*, and with Jeremy Parrott, with a view to clarifying this specific point. Dr. Parrott graciously shared with me the fact that, according to the marginalia in his unique set, the author of the piece was in fact Chorley. He helpfully clarified that the new piece by Gaskell (who had been referred to in the *Independent* piece) was in fact “Select Committee on French Songs. Two Sitings,” *All the Year Round* 6 (1 Feb., 8 March 1862): 448–54, 561–68.

This clarification proves the point that while there may be an excitement, and a consequent inclination to rush to get such complicated details of authorship into the public domain as quickly as possible, there is great

merit in holding back and waiting patiently for the careful accumulation of detail, by those most centrally involved in such a complex – but hugely rewarding – task. I understand that plans are at an advanced stage, to issue (through a leading academic publishing house with international distribution) a complete listing of contributors to *All the Year Round*. This scholarly volume, appropriately annotated and checked, with an apparatus that provides sufficient context for future generations of scholars to make appropriate and confident use of the material, will precede authorized forms of internet publication, with open access for all. I am confident that this tandem process will reach its proper conclusion as soon as can reasonably be expected, given the scope of the task of assessing and interpreting such a landmark discovery.

Yours as ever,

Leon Litvack
Principal Editor,
The Charles Dickens Letters Project